

Rob Rocke

12 March, 2012

Senator Andrew Maynard
Representative Antonio Guerrero
Co-Chairs, Senate Transportation Committee
Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

RE: HB 5458: AN ACT CONCERNING MUNICIPAL AUTOMATED TRAFFIC ENFORCEMENT SAFETY DEVICES AT CERTAIN INTERSECTIONS.

Honorable Senator Maynard, Honorable Representative Guerrero, members of the Transportation Committee, fellow Representatives and Senators of the CT General Assembly:

I am writing to urge your support in passing automatic intersection safety camera **enabling** legislation in Connecticut. I have been a resident of New Haven's East Rock neighborhood for almost years. I am an alumnus of Yale University and currently work for Yale's Information Technology department. I do not drive to work, but rather commute to work either by biking or walking. My job responsibilities also necessitate that I travel to many different locations around Yale's campus on a daily basis. This, too, I do by foot and bicycle. I am therefore particularly sensitive to the public safety concerns of unsafe streets. Those experiences led me to join Elm City Cycling, New Haven's premier bicycling/pedestrian advocacy group, and I have been an active member of that group for many years. In fact I currently sit on the Board of Elm City Cycling.

The streets I navigate day-to-day feel less safe than they've ever been. Of all the behaviors I witness, motor vehicle drivers running red lights is one of the most blatant and most ubiquitous violations. It is also one of the most life-threatening. I've regularly counted one, two, and sometimes even three cars at an intersection ignoring a red light and blowing through the intersection as if it's their right to do so. Make no mistake: this is not a case of a close call. These drivers aren't getting stuck in the amber phase and making a judgment call to proceed. No: it's more like they think they don't have to obey the law. Or maybe it's just that past experience has conditioned these drivers into thinking that there is no consequence for their illegal action.

Running red lights is clearly dangerous, and most certainly illegal. Yet there are simply not enough police officers to cover every intersection at every time of day. Especially in this time of decreasing budgets, increasing cost-consciousness, and the competing demands placed on officers' time, now is the perfect time to embrace technology to help the police enforce the

laws on our books, especially when there's such a direct implication for an increase in public safety.

I've been a strong supporter of red light cameras as a law-enforcement device for many years, and I've heard many of the privacy-rights arguments against their use. I don't buy them. In fact, I've come to conclude that there is a general fear of technology at play. Folks misunderstand what the technology actually does. At the same time, I think folks naively underplay how much legal "privacy-compromising" technology is already in use: take the imagery available from Google Earth, the license-plate scanning technology our cities use to tag and "boot" delinquent property tax payers, or the personal information we all give away on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

I am a passionate advocate for civil rights, and have been a card-carrying member of the ACLU for many years. In fact I care about as much about privacy issues as I do about bicyclist and pedestrian safety, yet I see no compelling contradiction between the two. Driving motor vehicles is something we all do in the public arena. Our behavior is visible for all to see. These cameras aren't invading the sanctity of activities we're performing in the privacy of our own homes. There is nothing "private" in choosing to participate in our public roadway system by becoming a licensed driver, and claims of privacy shouldn't be a way to hide behind breaking the law and endangering one's fellow citizenry.

So yes, I know much fear is spread about these imagined "Big-Brother" cameras, but please take a look at what the technology actually does. It takes a wide-angle photograph of the vehicle in the intersection running the red light with no details of the driver or passenger(s), as well as a close-up shot of the vehicle's license plate.

Municipal budgets are shrinking, local police departments' budgets are shrinking, and the police themselves admit that there is an inherent danger for them to do on-site traffic enforcement at certain high-profile intersections. Furthermore, red-light running is so prevalent that the police simply can't be everywhere all the time. Given this reality I think Connecticut owes its citizens at least the option to decide for themselves at the municipal level whether or not intersection safety cameras might be an effective tool in the arsenal of their local law enforcement

Furthermore, I think that the revenue generated from the tickets issued using this automated intersection safety technology should be used **exclusively** for projects that directly increase traffic safety, whether that be engineering projects or educational campaigns. (For example, I know a "three-foot passing zone" for motor vehicles passing bicyclists is now law, but I don't think passage of that excellent piece of legislation was ever really publicized statewide in a meaningful way. As a cyclist I've encountered many a police officer who isn't even aware of this legislation, which makes moot the whole concept of using the three-foot law to keep cyclists safe.)

I believe that the decrease in cars running red lights as a result of red light cameras being used as a automated traffic enforcement device will have the direct effect of increasing public safety.

This in turn will have a positive impact on the overall quality of life in communities throughout our great state. With that in mind I offer my **enthusiastic** support for such legislation, and I urge you to do the same.

Thank you,

Rob Rocke